

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 22, 2014

Agenda Item: 2014 Wolf Season - Proposed

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed for Presentation: 1 hour

Background

Regulated public hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. The Commission adopted a conservative hunting-only quota of 75 wolves for the 2009 season. That wolf hunting season closed with a legal harvest of 72. The minimum wolf count increased in 2009 from 497 to 524 wolves. For the 2010 season, which was blocked by court ruling, the Commission adopted a statewide quota of 186 with 13 wolf management units. The 2011 season had a statewide hunting-only quota of 220 wolves with 14 WMUs. Including a season extension to Feb. 15, 2012, 166 wolves were harvested with three of the 14 WMU's closing due to their quota being met. WMU boundaries were again modified for 2012–13. There was no statewide quota and trapping was added as a method of take from Dec. 15, 2012 through Feb. 28. During 2012, 2,414 trappers completed the Montana Wolf Trapper Education Course. The regular rifle season was expanded to run from Oct. 15, 2012 through Feb. 28, 2013. The Commission approved a 3-wolf bag limit that was implemented with the passage of House Bill 73. By season end, trappers harvested 97 wolves while hunter harvested 128 (225 total).

Changes implemented for the 2013–14 wolf season included adjusting the archery season to run from Sept. 7–14. The rifle season opened Sept. 15 and closed March 15. The bag limit was 5 wolves per person in any combination of wolves taken by hunting or trapping. WMUs 313 and 316 north of Yellowstone National Park had quotas of 4 and 3 wolves respectively. Trappers were required to dispatch wolves via gunshot. In Regions 1–5, trappers were required to set pan tensions on wolf traps to 10 pounds to minimize the take of lynx, wolverines, and other non-target species.

For the 2014–15 wolf season, the only proposed adjustments are to reduce the closure period in WMUs 313 and 316 from 24 hours to 12 hours. This will have the effect of closing the wolf harvest season at the end of the same day the closure notice is posted. Limited wolf trapping opportunities via drawing are also proposed for the Blackfoot-Clearwater, Fish Creek, and Mount Haggin WMAs. All other season structures are proposed to remain unchanged from the 2013–14 wolf season.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Public comment would be taken until 5 p.m., June 23. Final adoption would be scheduled for July.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposals may be approved as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, with deletions or no change from 2013–14 per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission direction

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

The mostly status quo proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, livestock depredation trends, survey efforts, and public comment. It's consistent with wolf season objectives, other species management and continues to value wolves as an integral component of functioning ecosystems. The proposal is consistent with the Montana Gray Wolf Management Plan.

Proposed Motion

I move to approve for public comment the proposed 2014-15 wolf season as presented by FWP.